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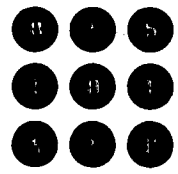


from
CUSTOM-MADE
AFRICAN
PAJAMAS *to*
SUPER-CHEAP
CUT AND
COLORS

& Primp

SHOP

Best T-shirts for angry boys

Chuck Guarino, co-founder of **THECAST** clothing, doesn't seem like an angry young man. With his curly hair and friendly eyes, his manner is mellow, affable, possibly slightly stoned. But the sexy shirts he and Ryan Turner design tell a different story. The distressed tees, printed with water-based ink on a single press in a basement on Ludlow Street, are resplendent with twining serpents, fierce eagles, grinning skulls, Old West outlaws, bat skeletons, and all manner of knives. Designs have titles such as *Wreath With Dead Hanging Sheep* and *Death Skull*. Even the basement workshop, cluttered with sample garments and fabric swatches, boasts more than its fair share of bones and taxidermy animal heads. "Discolored, distressed, and printed by hand," THECAST shirts feature pictures that are precise but never ornate; meticulous but dangerous too—fit to adorn even the most sullen breast. As Guarino explains, "We just kind of go with the imagery that belongs on the shirt. We thrash up the shirts a little, so it wouldn't make sense to have something really pretty." Boys who prefer their shirts unpretty can find the tees at Odin, La Di Da, and Steven Alan. *thecast.com.* ***Alexis Soloski***

Best designer store to score '60s-inspired stewardess outfits

Although I definitely approve of the educated view society as a whole has come to adopt toward stewardesses (I mean flight attendants), part of me remains nostalgic for their adorably funky outfits of yesterday (and not just on Halloween). Thankfully, **Label** has come to the rescue. Located a block south of Houston, this Los Angeles–based designer store resembles what I imagine Judy Jetson's closet to look like—that is, if she grew up and became a flight girl for TWA. Here A-line stretch cotton dresses with extroverted shoulder points and boiled-wool jackets with quirky piping details deck the small space. It's as if 1962 collided aesthetically with what 2062 might look like: The designs are not only innovative (think fun appliqué collars and unusual cutouts) but also extremely comfortable—perfect for a transatlantic flight or future moon adventure. *265 Lafayette Street.* ***Jessie Pascoe***

Best place to turn cartwheels over a button

The regal Statue of Liberty that guards New York with her stern visage and raised lamp isn't the only monument to the millions of immigrants who made (and still make) our city great: the giant Pop Art button-and-needle assemblage atop the Fashion Center kiosk at Seventh Avenue and 39th Street serves as a whimsical testament to the ceaseless toil of those who built this city one shirtwaist at a time. Wander down any of the streets of the garment district (approximately one square mile surrounding Madison Square Garden) and you'll find pattern cutters, wholesalers, and specialty stores aplenty, including the amazing **Vardhman Inc.** Of the many sellers of dazzling fabrics, braids, trims, and notions along 38th and 39th streets between Seventh and Eighth avenues, this delightful shoebox is the best reminder that buttons are not merely those things you click on websites. Vardhman has literally thousands in almost any shape you can name (and some that defy description) crafted of bright metals and plastics, some encrusted with beads and gaudy faux jewels. But the real treasures are the little works of art in horn, bone, and wood. If you're into DIY couture, here's where you'll find the perfect closure for that gorgeous garment you've just whipped up. If you're more the aspirational type, just buy a handful of the wonders and display them like the treasures they are. *257 West 39th Street, 212-840-6950.* ***LD Beghtol***

Best place to trip and fall while running toward a French-schoolgirl jumper

There it is, sitting in the window of **A.P.C.**: the sublime French-schoolgirl jumper of your dreams. Able to convert the most trucker-mouthed skank into a ruddy-cheeked Amélie ingenue, this is the kind of garb that makes you want to ride bicycles, buy baguettes, practice bad high school French. Throwing open A.P.C.'s door, you run to it—it's on the rack, probably in your size, and, *what the . . . ?*—you catch a toe on one of those uneven wooden planks that subs for A.P.C.'s floor and eat it in front of the pretty salesboy refolding the skinny jeans. God only knows why this French store chose to hang onto those uneven floorboards of death, a leftover architectural conceit from previous inhabitant Azzedine Alaia. Are they speed bumps for overeager A.P.C fanatics? Or just part of the store's whole faux-dilapidated barn house aesthetic, which somehow magically makes customers buy more stuff? *131 Mercer Street, 212-966-9685.* ***Corina Zappia***

Best crafty ladies

On Columbia Street, Red Hook's decrepit industrial chic meets a much tidier and more ladylike élan. Red painted walls and granny-esque light fixtures illuminate a collection of blouses, jewels, paintings, photographs, and some gorgeous guitar straps embroidered with the legend "Love Will Tear Us Apart." Since 2004, craftsters Rachel Goldberg, a jewelry maker, and Tessa Phillips, a clothing designer, have manned **Brooklyn Collective.** As if Goldberg's horse head and silver beetle pendants or Phillips's rock 'n' roll Victoriana weren't a sufficient attraction, the young women rent space in the store to a mostly local mix of seamstresses, photographers, accessories designers, and other craftsmen and women. (We're especially partial to the hand-painted sneakers, decorated with dinosaur silhouettes, by Species of Thousands.) Invited artists lease a space for three to six months, choose what to stock, and keep 100 percent of the profits. Female shoppers can amuse themselves browsing amid the trinkets and artworks; their boyfriends (or at least my boyfriend) can admire the cutie-pie own-

PRECEDING SPREAD

Dress by ANTONIO BERARDI
Bra by COCO DE MER
Necklace by BIJULES
Coat by JEAN PAUL GAULTIER
Boots and shoes by GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI

Styled by Katharine Erwin; hair by Algene for Sally Harlor; makeup by Sonja for Illusions, NYC

>>

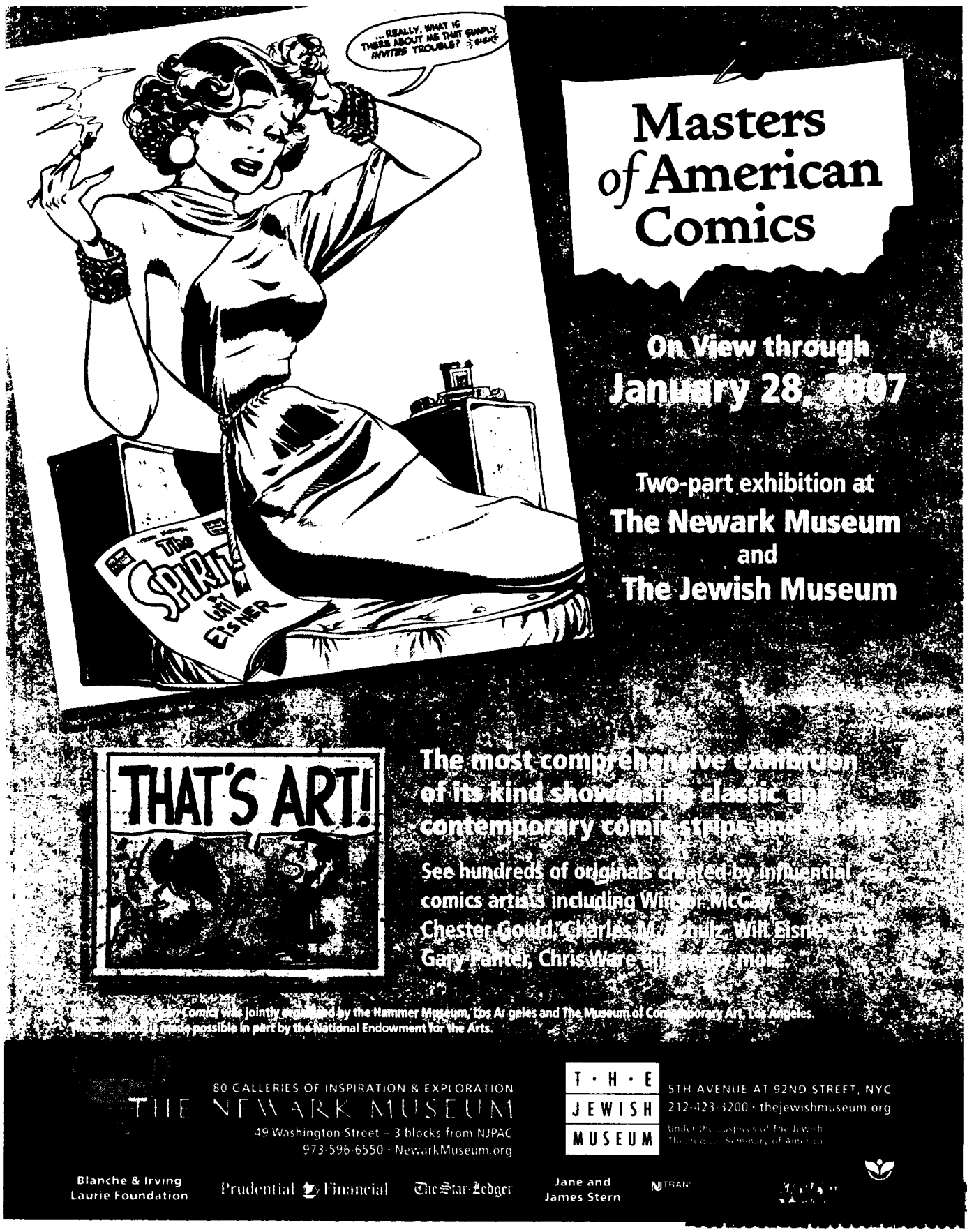
>> ers introduce each seasonal collection with an open-bar party at next door's Lido bar. *198 Columbia Street, Brooklyn.* ***Soloski***

Best left-wing recruiting organization disguised as a toy store

Kaya is a Nez Percé girl growing up circa 1764 and dreaming of becoming a tribal leader; 18th-century Felicity is antsy doing the sitting-down kinds of things that colonial girls are expected to do; Addy escapes from slavery and learns to read and write; in circa 1824 New Mexico, motherless Josefina and her sisters watch balefully as the new Americano traders arrive from the East; rich Samantha sees that being poor sucks when she befriends Nellie, a servant girl; Kit endures Depression-era Cincinnati with her jobless father; Molly saves rubber and eats turnips for dinner during World War II. All these yearning, striving proto-feminists have one thing in common—they are plastic **American Girl** dolls, they are packaged with dense, elaborate personal histories, and they are accoutred—even the impoverished ones—with a multiplicity of outfits, books, pets, and furniture (all at additional cost). One thing is certain: Their wholesome, politically correct cheeriness has wiped the toy store floor with sullen, slutty Barbie, a fashion model who clearly has never suffered one day in her life and cares for no one but herself. *609 Fifth Avenue, 1-877-AG-PLACE.* ***Lynn Yaeger***

Best place to fill up on free samples while shopping in Soho

Shopping in Soho can be difficult and draining, and it can also make you feel very poor. Which is why I'm hanging out at the meat counter of **Dean & DeLuca** with two other women and we're all agreeing that the roasted chicken tastes great as we take a toothpick, stab at a heaping platter of chicken cubes, eat the delicious morsel (with big smiles for the guy behind the counter), throw away the toothpick, and repeat. By my third helping I notice the chicken is a bit bland. Thank God there are samples of saffron salt nearby. And a few feet from the salt are bread baskets—yum, sourdough, my favorite. I take a handful, walk around the counter, and take some more. If it were a smaller store with watchful employees, I might feel obliged to pretend that I wanted to buy something. Instead, with no shopping basket in hand, I head straight for the cheese counter. "Do you have any samples?" I ask. He takes out a plate of gruyère from behind the counter. Did I just eat a gourmet chicken-and-cheese sandwich for free? Yes I did. *560 Broadway, 212-226-6800.* ***Angela Ashman***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Best boutique to help you break the black-clothing habit

Call it oversimplification, but when it comes to fashion, there are two kinds of people: those willing to wear colors and those who cling stubbornly to black. Maybe your penchant for sepulchral hues developed during an angsty goth phase, or perhaps it's just a lazy habit to avoid mixing and matching in the bleary-eyed morning. Whatever the case, a trip to **Alpana Bawa**'s tiny downtown boutique will permanently cure you of your chromophobia. The racks teem with ultra-vivid fuchsia, mustard, and lime-green garments for women and men in tasty fabrics like silk and cotton voile. Although Bawa's Indian roots are apparent in her clothes, the surprising textures, shapes, appliqués, and embroidery make these more than exercises in crass exoticism. Nothing here is cheap, but then again, an outfit will cost a lot less than a trip to the subcontinent. *70 East 1st Street, 212-254-1249.* ***Joy Press***

Best place to watch Brooklyn girls rationalize spending the rent money on a $300 top

The sign on the front door of **Bird**, a Carroll Gardens boutique, should say, "Enter at your own risk." But the Brooklyn girl who can't afford Manhattan prices on her entry-level salary would probably ignore it anyway. The purposely rusted signage out front and rustic wood exterior (shack chic?) and mannequins dressed in effortlessly cool outfits in the window appeal to her inner desire to look hip without trying very hard. "How much are these earrings?" a shopper asks a saleswoman of some tiny beaded things. "$116," comes the reply. The girl's face droops. The store features two cabinets of quirky lockets and jewelry, scarves are loosely strewn on one wall, and the racks are stuffed with See by Chloé, Sonia Rykiel, Hussein Chalayan, and Phillip Lim with a good variety of smaller designer names (read: less expensive) to make it seem as though not everything is $300. But the big-name designers are nearly impossible to resist. Most likely to be overheard at the cash register: "I won't buy anything else all year," or "I'll wear this every single day." Clutching $300 Chloé tops of their own, her girlfriends nod happily in agreement. *220 Smith Street, Brooklyn, 718-797-3776.* ***Ashman***

Best shop resembling a walk-in closet aboard a first-class liner

This closet-size shop, actually reached through another store, showcases comfortable and glamorous contemporary and vintage threads perfect for starboard strolls and champagne hour on a Capri yacht. (Or the more practical application: dinner and a movie.) Owned by a mother/daughter team, **Dane 115** offers modern and retro designs that are a playful mix of

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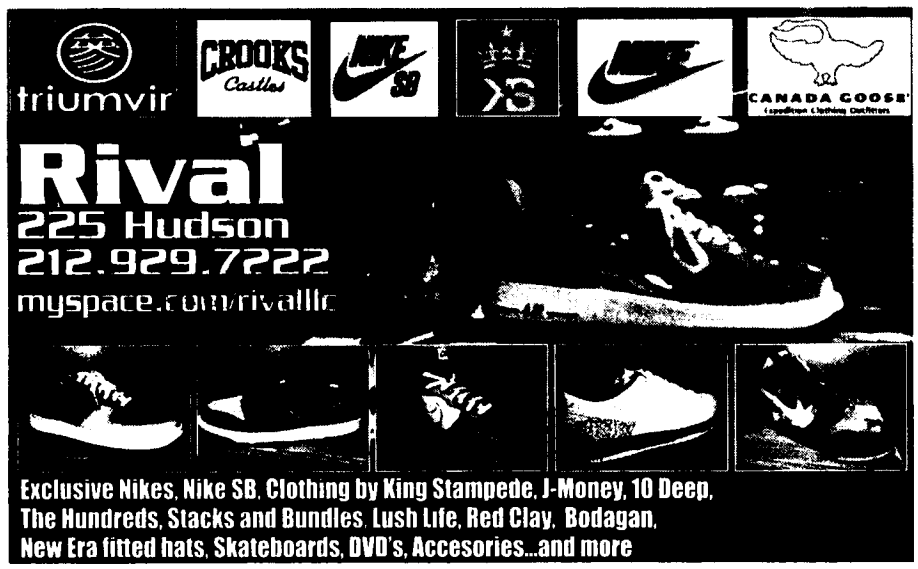


>> sporty and decadent, reminiscent of an era when luxury meant all that was excessive and languidly comfortable. (Coco would so approve.) These designs are offset by the rich burgundy walls, detailed tin roof, and willowy shell chandeliers. The owners don't let the dust settle on their jewel of a boutique. Every season they tailor the stock to a particular country: past focuses have included Paris, New York, and recently Belgium—all ensuring a fresh jolt of talent and eclecticism. Although some ticket prices might make you feel faint, their weekend sidewalk sales (think purses that were $100 going for $20) will have your breathing deep sighs of relief. *115 Crosby Street, 212-431-1295.* ***Pascoe***

Best place to feel that your clothing is unworthy of even ironic hipster consumption

On the surface, **Beacon's Closet** appears far less elitist than the city's many designer-only consignment shops. Accepting plebeian garb that doesn't boast a Marc Jacobs or Prada label, it's the one place your last-season Gap denim skirt can be exchanged for the few measly bucks it's worth. Or so one would think. Beacon's actually goes by a whole other judging criterion, one that's far more elusive and random. Try sweating it out for the five or 10 minutes Beacon's employees invite you to "look around" while they sort through your stuff (they need time to go through your slutty college castoffs and make rude comments about you in private, don't they?). Drop back a few minutes later, and you'll have your perfectly reasonable Zara white linen skirt and red H&M top handed back for being dully unacceptable, while the pud next to you with a torn Toto shirt gets the open-armed welcome, not to mention the cash. Is it that your clothes are too repulsive . . . or not repulsive enough? *88 North 11th Street, Brooklyn, 718-486-0816; 220 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn.* ***Zappia***

Best eco-friendly fashions

Unfortunately, when most people think of eco-friendly fashion, their minds inevitably conjure up loose-fitting tunics with marijuana leaves plastered everywhere or the ever ubiquitous fratboy hemp necklace. It's a tough call: Who wants to save the planet looking like Woody Harrelson? The East Village store **Gominyc** will help you rescue the earth while looking your best. From funky silk-screen T-shirts and Brazilian vegetable-tanned leather shoes to breezy kids' sundresses and recycled vintage jackets, their threads are as ecologically mindful as they are hip. A bath and home section extends this devotion to a healthy lifestyle with bowls made from recycled magazines and melted records, organic bamboo utensils, and funky candles—ultimately proving that there is nothing inconvenient about living a trendy yet environmentally truthful life. Plus, if you purchase their free-trade coffee beans, you'll at least have the much needed energy to follow through with volunteering at the Sierra Club. *443 East 6th Street, 212-979-0388.* ***Pascoe***

Best place to find a trilby

Are the words *dapper*, *rakish*, and *smart* like pornography to you? Do you long to be as perfectly turned out as Pharrell Williams, Adrien Brody, or Andre 3000, resplendent in immaculate togs that would put Fred Astaire or Bryan Ferry to shame? Even the fuzzy gentlemen of ZZ Top know the value of dressing sharp for getting noticed—and getting lucky. Like it or not, clothes make the man (unless you're blessed with perfect skin/hair/abs etc.), and Eros is in the details. Sex up your life with swank duds from the best tailor or designer secondhand store you can afford, and then make that leap toward fashion immortality: perfect accessories. While even those who despise show tunes know that "you're never fully dressed without a smile"—everything else costs. But that needn't send you to debtors' prison. Visit third-generation, family-owned **Arnold Hatters**—New York's nattiest selection of men's toppers. Big names like Dobbs, Stetson, and Kangol are the brands of choice for the off-the-rack and semi-custom headgear here, and the styles available are like a hymn to male sartorial perfection: grand beaver homburg, Bailey derby, baobab braided straw trilby, ivy cap, Bogart fedora, shantung panama, Biltmore rain crusher, suede Baretta cap, satin collapsible, three-inch boater, tropic spitfire. Arnold's also offers canes to complement your new headgear. *535 Eighth Avenue, 800-628-HATS, ahat.com.* ***Beghtol***

Best new place to buy plain clothes

It can be hard to find the simplest clothes. What some stores tout as basics—solid-color T-shirts and button-ups, striped polos, plain khakis—often come emblazoned with unwelcome, unattractive logos or labels. And for every one of those ugly tags, the price seems to go up another $10—these companies should be paying *us* to advertise for them! Things are different at **Uniqlo**. The first time I went to this Japanese retailer—in Japan—I found myself in a four-floor paradise of basics that really were, and almost nothing cost more than $20. I returned to the U.S. with a bag full of shirts, doubting I'd ever get the chance to shop at this special place again. But—lovers of plain clothes, rejoice!—Uniqlo has set up shop in Soho. Plus, this fall the company promises the grand opening of a 36,000-square-foot "global flagship store" at 564 Broadway—which will, no doubt, offer a vast selection of tasteful, inexpensive shirts and pants (which they will alter to fit). Back in the '80s, Japanese upstarts like Toyota forced U.S. automakers to change their ways; could Uniqlo do the same to American clothiers? *486 Broadway and other locations, 212-966-5374, uniqlo.com.* ***Danial Adkison***

Best vintage platform shoe collection

"After dating someone for a few months you realize he's either too weird or too small," exclaimed a young woman sitting in one of the lounge chairs in **Poppet**, a cozy vintage shop off First Avenue. Two other women giggled and I couldn't help cracking a smile myself. Every time I pop into this East Village boutique I feel as if I have stumbled into a 1960s mod tea party complete with girly girls, giggles, and perhaps *most* distracting, an assortment of platform shoes that I think should be in a museum. The owners of this jewel-box boutique, previously called Psyche's Tears, scour the planet for the best and quirky in wedge design—from the backyards of Ohio to the streets of London, from well-known labels to obscure brands, from cork to Cherokee, this retro retreat's darling varieties will have you resembling a model

from a vintage *Vogue* photo spread in no time. Or, at the very least, you'll be elevated to equal height. *350 East 9th Street, 212-924-3190.* ***Pascoe***

Best newfangled drug paraphernalia

When joint-rolling time approaches, you probably just sit there on the edge of the couch, hunched over, pulling the buds off the sticks and smushing them up between your pathetic little fingers. And that's fine. You're just not a real pothead. Serious cannabis connoisseurs take full advantage of the plant—they know it's not just the flower but the kief, or resin, that is a gift to be cherished. Kief is basically loose, unformed hash—hash on the weekends, not all buttoned up and square. Like cavemen using every part of the once mighty mastodon, potheads have devoted considerable thought to the problem of harvesting this beloved and potent stuff. Those in the know swear by what is known as the **kiefer**. One expert we contacted to learn more about the device described it thusly: "It's just a cheaper version of a coke grinder." Well, there you go, folks. The kiefer is a metal cylinder that works like a pepper grinder, only instead of a grinder, it has two screens inside. The weed is pushed through the top screen, and the kief then passes through a second, finer screen and is collected in a container on the bottom. Sprinkle the magic dust on top of a bud, like sprinkles on an ice cream cone, or roll a joint of the stuff and lose your mind. When you decide to get serious, kiefers can be found in your finer West Village head shops for around $30. ***Nina Lalli***

Best place to do well by looking good

Yes, we like to think of ourselves as sensitive and ethical consumers. But even if Park Slope's **Umkarna** didn't feature clothing made by women's collectives, even if it didn't favor natural and recycled materials, even if it didn't embellish its website with a quotation from Walter Benjamin, we'd still shop there. We'd wear the brightly colored silk wrap dresses, drape our bed in the exuberantly hand-stitched pre-Partition Ralli quilts, and adorn ourselves with wooden and metal bangles, but we likely wouldn't feel quite so good about it. Happily, there's no occasion for guilt or remorse. For the past several years, owner Luisa Giugliano has used a women's collective in New Delhi to produce Umkarna's house line, and she ensures that the other labels she stocks (Burning Torch, Twelfth Street by Cynthia Vincent, numerous jewelry designers) pay their workers a decent wage. Giugliano and her husband travel to India several times a year to search out vintage jewelry and textiles. Fair trade? Perhaps the fairest of them all. *69 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, 718-398-5888.* ***Soloski***

Best store to find designer clothes that could have been on *That '70s Show*

May 18, 2006, was a very sad day for millions, as the last episode of *That '70s Show* aired. Although there will always be reruns, a more tangible way to fill this void is a shopping spree at **Apt 141**, a small boutique whose unique designs speak to the relaxed earthiness that dominated the female wardrobes on that TV hit. Simply slip on a wrap dress in an autumn shade, add some gold jewelry, don matching sparkly heels, and voilà—you're a perfect Jackie. Feeling lower maintenance? Then tie on a funky kimono tunic, throw on some denim bells, and be Donna for the day. As you debate which look to purchase, the soothing background lounge tunes add to the pleasant realization that, although these threads are often one of a kind, their prices, as well as their aesthetic, are crystallized in that disco decade. So be excessive, buy both looks—after all, doesn't everyone have a little bit of Jackie and Donna in them? *141 East 13th Street, 212-982-4227.* ***Pascoe***

Best vintage store to find hats that will probably appear in Broadway productions

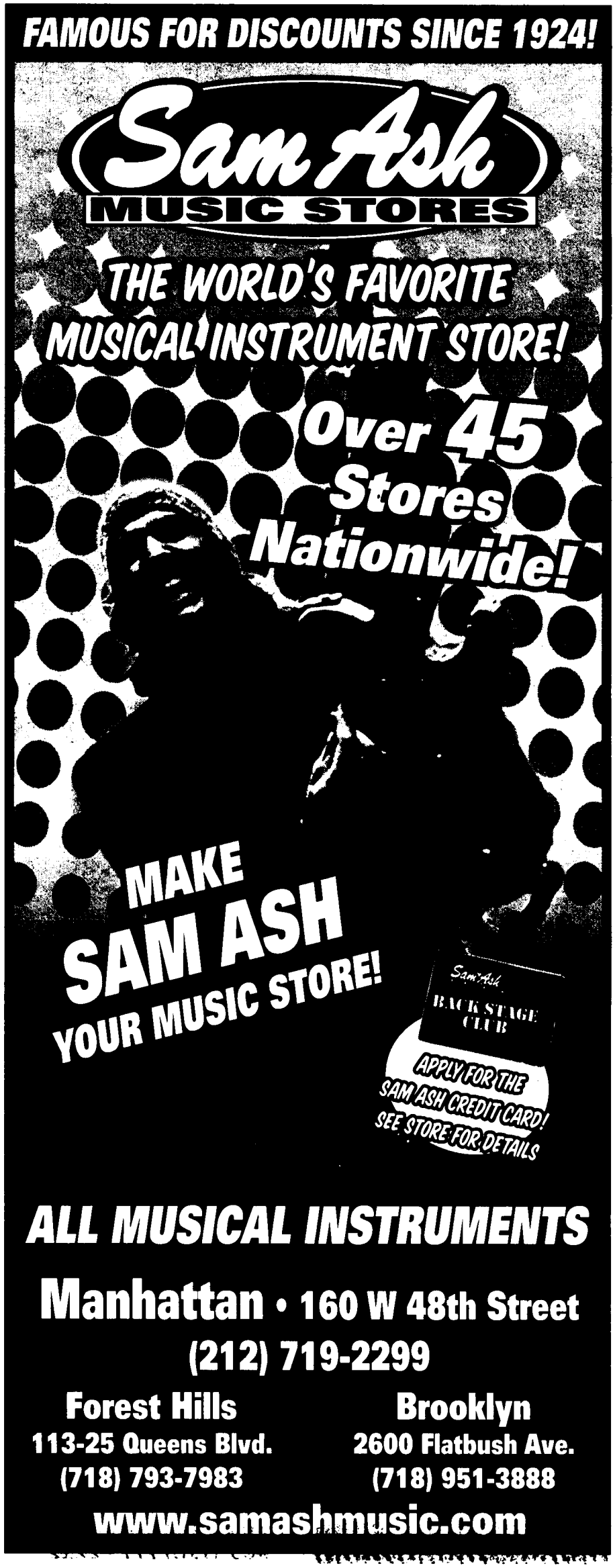
Stealing its name from a Shakespeare sonnet testifies to **O Mistress Mine**'s theatrical ambitions. Showcasing frilly clothes from the turn of the century to shoulder-pad power dresses from the '80s, this vintage boutique has been displaying Costume History 101 in its small Seventh Avenue location since 1969. Besides the place's Bard-influenced moniker, the wide selection of hats available season after season lures uptown theater companies hungry to score authentic and mint-condition bonnets, boaters, chapeaus, fedoras, pillboxes, skullcaps, and other quirky designs from closets past. From the wide-rimmed Southern belle brims to the sophisticated city look of a fez, this retro gem is a sure spot to score a look that actually might pop up in next year's acclaimed Broadway hit. And with prices as reasonable as these, you might even still be able to afford an opening-night ticket! *143 Seventh Avenue, 212-691-4327.* ***Pascoe***

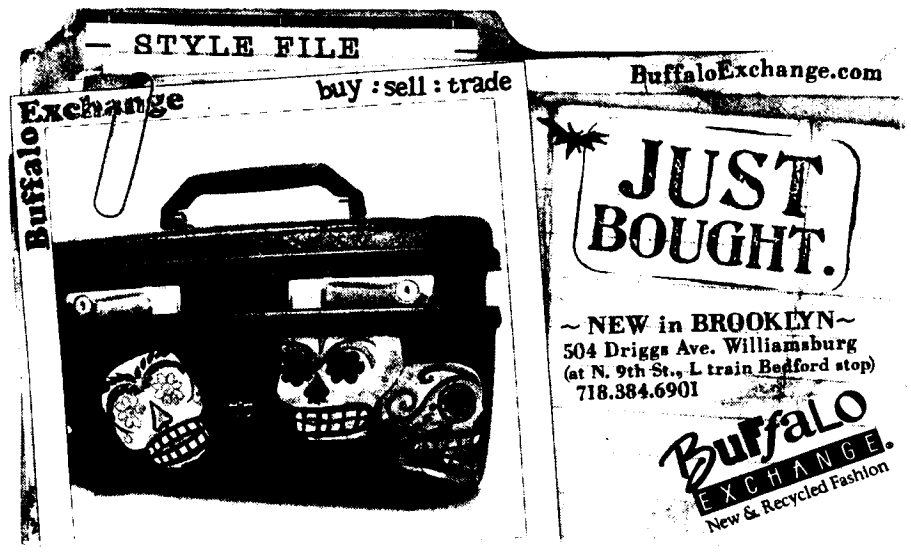
Best reason to be a grown-up

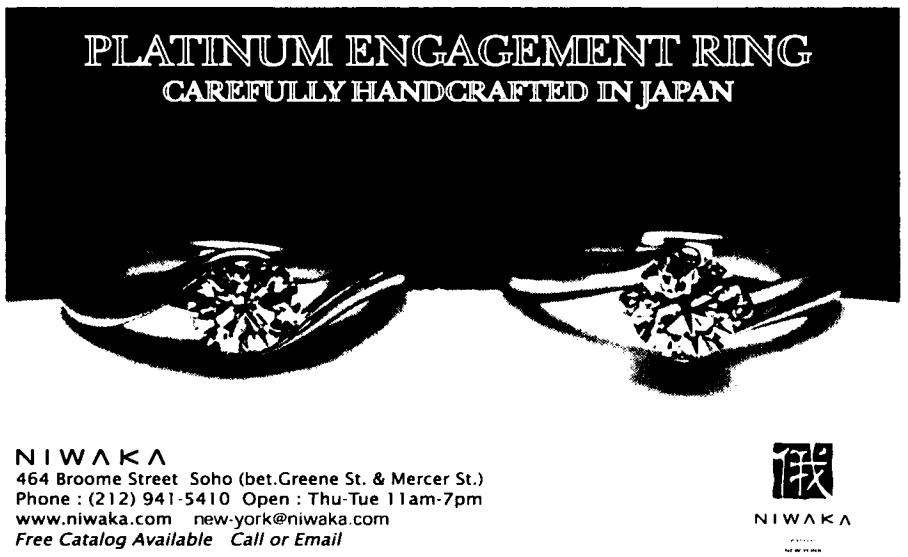
Somebody please start playing the violin, because this is about to get pretty weepy. I was a poor kid growing up, and the little money that seemed to come in went out to Pop's bookie pretty fast. I remember loan sharks politely asking me, "Hey kid, where's your father, he's due some late-payment physical therapy." On the flip side of this coin was a palace of wonder on Metropolitan Ave: Minnie's Candy Store. We weren't too bright, but my brother Peter and I were smart enough to befriend the local candy store owner's son. So we sort of had a special arrangement, gobbling up free candy at will. Then, alas, we grew up and the free sugar train ended. Now, since I have to actually pay for my goodies, I find my money is never better spent than at **Kee's Chocolate Shop.** Opened in 2002 by Kee Ling Tong, who can be found hand-making her little cocoa orgasms for the mouth six days a week at this tiny Soho shop, Kee's offers flavors like crème brûlée, honey kumquat, blood orange, and black sesame. You may quickly realize that you are not a kid in a candy store anymore, but this is actually kind of great, because nobody can tell you you're buying too much. Chocolates are $1.75 each. A box of 6 is $10.50; a box of 12 is $21.00; a box of 16 is $28.00; a box of 18 is $31.50; and a box of 24 is $42.00. *80 Thompson Street, 212-334-3284, keeschocolates.com.* ***Andrew Aber***

Best place to buy yourself giant plastic bling

Even if you're an old-fashioned sort who still thinks that serious rocks should come from and be paid for by someone else, >>



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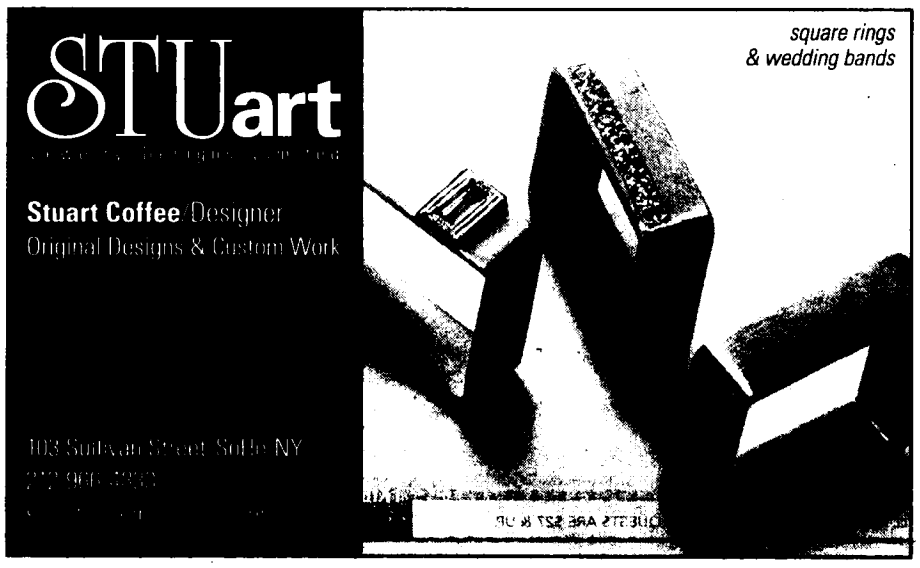

>> sometimes you need to show yourself some love. You deserve a present. Enter **Cinderella**. When you first walk in, you're just kidding—a gargantuan disco ball perched on your finger? Hilarious. But the longer you're in there, the easier it becomes to lose all perspective and think, "This does kind of look like J.Lo's second engagement ring," or Cameron Diaz's hoop earrings, or the charm that Carrie wore around her neck on *Sex and the City*, which, after all, *was* meant to be ironic. But fashion forward at the same time . . . right? Luckily, by the time you face reality about a week later, you'll have gotten your money's worth. *17 St. Marks Place, 212-777-2430.* ***Lalli***

Best place to make new costume jewelry

As a self-respecting former fine-art major with a grain of fashion sense, I find myself perpetually gawking at jewelry cases and thinking, "I can make that." But nothing is accomplished by sheer will; there must also be a way. Ever since I discovered **Toho Shoji**, a Japanese mega-mart of bijous, my jewelry box runneth over. Completely affordable and definitely overwhelming, Toho has every finding, bead, and tool you could ever need. Dying to make one of those little baubles that dangle from a cell phone? For $1 you can get two of the phone cords, and for under a dollar each you can take your pick of brass or silver charms to add on—perhaps a pair of headphones, a pineapple, or even the word *cutie*. Ready-made chains come in all different lengths for $3 to $4 and are just aching to be hung with an oversize heart-shaped locket ($3.50) big enough to fit a picture of your whole family or a small work of art. *990 Sixth Avenue, 212-868-7465.* ***Stevie Remsberg***

Best inexpensive jewelry that doesn't look cheap

If you're not a member of the kind of family that passes heirlooms down through the generations, do not despair. This is 2006. You can buy your own heirlooms, damn it. Ornate, old-world-looking lockets, silver rings that have achieved authentic patinas, and costume jewelry that last went out on the town in 1956 can all be had for shockingly low prices at **Pippin**—especially considering the hip location of the store. If you do come from an old-jewelry type of clan but feel oppressed by their uptight traditions, or are just plain broke, or hate their taste, Pippin also takes pieces on consignment and does trades. And if you're a boy who needs to impress your girlfriend, the woman who runs the store will help you sort through all their treasures and find a charm necklace or beaded bracelet that looks special and unique but costs you only around $20. *72 Orchard Street, 212-505-5159.* ***Lalli***

Best public junk collection

Marty's Cool Stuff is the store Edie Beale would have opened if she'd settled in the city and was into broken guitars, dog lamps, and back issues of *National Geographic*. The shop is so overrun you can't even go in (the door won't budge beyond a few feet), leaving the fifty-/sixtysomething owner to preside from a chair on the sidewalk. Lately, the shop's been shuttered. The hours were always erratic; he opened whenever he got the notion, it seemed. The view of the interior is cut off partway by what looks like a spread-eagled black hammock (to hide something from potential burglars?). Among the bits of weirdness to be had recently: a terrifying, smiling LBJ coffee mug; an enlarged, poster-board *New York Times* theater review, likely pulled from the nearby Culture Project's trash pile. The question "Why is it there?" extends to the place itself, as does "How?" Put Cool Stuff in a museum and it'd be a daunting specimen of authentically ragged physical collage. Now more than ever, it's a lesson in desuetude. *343 Lafayette Street.* ***Darren Reidy***

Best place to have African pajamas custom made for you

It doesn't have to be pajamas—let's be clear. You can have practically anything made at **Djema Imports**. A gown, a miniskirt, a pants suit . . . even curtains. The store is Harlem's largest provider of imported African fabric, and the selection is overwhelming. The 1,000-square-foot space is filled with neat rolls of printed cotton, rare and beautiful mud cloths, and accessories like hats, beads, and bags. If it's all too much to wrap your little head around, the owners and tailors can help. They know what region each design comes from and what will work best for the garment of your dreams. Customized pieces take just two weeks to complete. The most popular styles are wrap skirts, blouses, and head wraps for women, and dashikis and kufis for men. These can even be ordered and customized online. But for inspiration, the store is the next best thing to a shopping trip to Africa. *6 East 125th Street, 212-289-3842.* ***Lalli***

Best store to feel like a fat American in

With such generous sizing in U.S. clothing stores, it's easy for ladies to be tricked into thinking that at a size six, they're small enough to fit into almost anything they want. That's when a trip to a shop like **Anemone** can provide one harsh reality check. The Nolita store pulls in browsers with a selection of charmingly abbreviated peacoats and bubble skirts that actually look flattering on the hanger—it's only when you try something on that you realize it's sized for a three-pound Asian woman. "Who fits into these clothes?" you wonder aloud, wrestling with a shirt that binds your breasts up around your armpits and a skirt that fits you like a tourniquet. "Not big fat Americans who brought us McDonald's and George Bush and screw-your-neighbor piggy capitalism," the clothes silently reply. *6 Prince Street, 212-343-4245.* ***Zappia***

Best place to buy Edith Wharton–worthy furniture

Not everyone wants to furnish an apartment with plastic storage cubes, brick-and-board bookcases, and Ikea bedsteads. More refined types, hell-bent on turning their tenement digs into an aerie worthy of Lily Bart (the place where she first lives, not the dump where she kills herself at the end of the book), should head to the **Calvary/St. George's Furniture Thrift Shop**, an old-fashioned venue connected to a church, which is crammed with oversize mahogany arts-and-crafts bookcases, backlit china cabinets, and Jean Harlow–esque dressing tables. Everything here appears to be in wonderful condition, the only drawback being that some of the best pieces are incredibly mammoth. Still, a new-old ar- >>

>> moire, no matter how gigantic, would look a lot better in your tiny bedroom than that eight-foot-tall pile of stuff on the floor. Most pieces are around $500, though there's a downstairs room with less-expensive offerings. A Victorian rocking chair, in remarkably good shape, was a tempting $150, and four refreshingly small wooden snack tables (you may know them by as TV trays) were $60 for the lot. *277 Park Avenue South, 212-475-6645.* ***Yaeger***

Best place to pursue eclectic modernism

You're smart, visually attuned, and on a tight New York budget. And your apartment is just killing you. Fresh paint helps, and so does getting rid of that lumpy old sofa and those kitschy-poo tchotchkes you collected during your protracted thrift store period. You're older now, and find yourself wiser. You want to live in a Designed Environment. But William Morris is well beyond your means . . . and if you see another Lloyd Loom settee cushioned with florid bark cloth you'll scream and scream and keep right on screaming until they haul you off to Bellevue. So: Eclectic modernism it is. Which means you can keep the Liberty Thebes stool your Grandma gave you, and that hideous (but perfectly sized) Ikea bookshelf, and those curtains you made yourself and still just love. Now what? Lamps. But not just any lamps: Noguchi lamps. These dreamy objects of rice paper and steel wire were designed by sculptor Isamu Noguchi in the mid 20th century and quickly attained iconic status for their clean lines, whimsical shapes, and reasonable prices. Buy yours (starting at $85) from the **Noguchi Museum**—the best reason never to set foot in Pier 1 ever again!—and live the dream. Maybe when you sell that screenplay you can buy a George Nelson clock too. *32-37 Vernon Boulevard, Long Island City, Queens, 718-204-7088, noguchi.org.* ***Beghtol***

Best place for brownstoners to buy original fixtures for cheap

The beauty of owning a brownstone—other than future profits—is the satisfaction one receives from restoring it to its former glory, before greedy landlords chopped it up and put Sheetrock over any trace of character it once held. But renovating a brownstone can be very expensive, and if you don't have the funds to patronize some posh antique store, your dream home could end up being just that. **Eddie's Antiques** is a homeowner's paradise, offering a wide variety of brownstone originals from doors and shutters to fireplaces and mantelpieces on the cheap. Missing one balustrade from the handrail of your stairs? Don't sweat it; Eddie's collection of obscure fittings is so extensive you're bound to find the perfect match. Browse though the Fred Sanford junkyard of Fort Greene as Eddie and his old-geezer crew strip, polish, and repair tables, chairs, and bedsteads on the sidewalk. This spot is a brownstoner's wet dream. Open Tuesday through Saturday only. *226 Greene Avenue, Brooklyn.* ***Adamma Ince***

Best one-inch lawnmowers

Most of the homes at **Tiny Doll House** look like they were lifted from a ghost story. Maids with perfect lace doilies on their heads poke in a permanent kneel, ready to clean the floor. A shrunken copy of the 1912 *New York Times*, with the headline "Titanic Sinks Four Hours After Hitting Iceberg," is splayed on a handmade Persian rug. The two resident decorators at the store, who call themselves elves, perform maintenance with a magnifying glass. A painting the size of a cracker costs $145—as much as a real one. "You have to realize this is an art," says one of the elves. "It takes incredible patience and most of us will probably go blind." *314 E 78th Street, 212-744-3719.* ***Rachel Aviv***

Best teapots that look like chemistry sets

Christmas morning 1983 I unwrapped one of the coolest presents I ever received, my very own chemistry set. Imagining myself a junior mad scientist, I used the beakers, vials, and test tubes to mix up important tinctures like invisible ink for writing secrets in my diary. Later, when chemistry was a requirement and grades depended on making my potions in class do unimaginative things like turn cloudy or not blow up, I realized that real science was not for me. But I never gave up my love of laboratory glass. Whipping up a batch of tea in a **Bodum** teapot, I can imagine myself winning the Nobel Prize for having just brewed a cure for cancer. The all glass De Chine teapot ($24.95) allows you to watch the brewing process, miraculously transforming the water to a light brown "tea" color before your eyes. The finished beverage can then be poured into space age Pavina double-wall tumblers ($14.95 for set of two). The thermal glasses hold hot or cold liquid suspended a half-inch above the table, making the most pedestrian beverages seem like scientific breakthroughs. Now if I could only get all those petri dish leftover experiments out of the fridge. *413–415 West 14th Street, 212-367-9125.* ***Remsberg***

Best guy when you need a pocket square/tie/shirt etc. at the oddest hour for the most important function

A few months ago, I went tearing over to the Duncan Quinn shop in Nolita. I needed a pocket square, of all things, and I needed it right that minute. The store, known for its luscious suits and men's shirts—off the rack or bespoke—was closed. There I stood, jacket slung over my shoulder. And there, behind the half-pulled gate, stood **David Reeves**, fashion savior. The expat from northern England let me in. He glanced at the jacket I needed to match, plucked the right swatch from a small stack, told me to use the reverse side of the fabric and demonstrated with a little cramming motion. "Just hatch it right in there," he said, and rang me up. Weeks later, I went for another square, this time without my jacket. No problem. "Yours was the one with the sort of gray houndstooth, wasn't it?" Reeves said. In a blink, I emerged with the second perfect square, by now a veteran of hatching it in there. The success was his. Go see him if you have even the vaguest itch to invest in these sorts of clothes. He's so good, you won't notice you just spent $75 on a five-by-three-inch piece of cloth. *8 Spring Street, 212-226-7030.* ***Laura Conaway***

Best place to buy inexpensive men's clothes that isn't Century 21

A fellow we know well works in what is arguably the toniest boutique on the Upper East Side. In that capacity he devises whole wardrobes for ladies who have the time and financial wherewithal to require such a service. In his private life, this guy lives on the Lower East Side with a French bulldog who has one brown eye and one blue. In both locations he is unfailingly debonair, with never a wrinkle on his shirt (unless it is meant to be wrinkled) or an errant crease in his trousers. He invariably tops off his ensemble with a cashmere sweater, sometimes even two: one a classic pullover, the other tied raffishly over his shoulders. And where does he get this stuff? Paul Stuart? Hermès? Bergdorf's men's store? Uh-uh. Because he is an old friend, he broke down and confessed to us after a long day: **Syms**. Well, Syms and a tailor, really. So we had a long talk, the point of which was: You need an eye for color. You need to be rigorous about fabric and fit. But when it comes to being truly stylish, you don't really need a lot of money. *400 Park Avenue, 212-317-8200.* ***Yaeger***

Best department store for strolling, if not buying

Though Fifth Avenue boasts a famous roster of department stores—Saks, Bendel's, Bergdorf's—each of which has its undeniable charms, none is as quirkily eccentric as **Takashimaya**. The New York branch of this Japanese company features a frankly nutty collection of departments: There's a gardening department (anybody you know need a spade?) on the main floor and a travel area upstairs featuring Baedekers and cashmere blankets, vintage watches and rolling suitcases. One whole floor is devoted to Asian antiques and furniture. The store buyers appear to seek out things you just don't see anywhere else, which is why you can find an aubergine silk negligee or a coral-beaded handbag but not a plain cotton T-shirt. Then again, who needs another T-shirt? *693 Fifth Avenue, 212-350-0100.* ***Yaeger***

Best peddlers of borough pride

It's not often that you see New Yorkers sporting clothing or accessories embroidered with the words *Manhattan, the Bronx,* or *Queens.* Not that those residents don't take pride in their respective boroughs—it's just that they don't have the genius that is **Brooklyn Industries** marketing their home turfs. This innovative clothing outlet began playing a major role in encouraging, promoting, and profiting from the unearthed sense of BK pride long before the borough was rediscovered at the beginning of the millennium. The mini-franchise keeps Brooklynites fully outfitted in a wide selection of community-casual T-shirts, hoodies, hats, and bags announcing BKLYN as the place to be. With locations in Park Slope, Williamsburg, Cobble Hill, and even Soho there's plenty of Brooklyn gear and pride to go around, so rock it while the borough's still hot. *brooklynindustries.com.* ***Ince***

Best bra-sserie

The entrance doesn't scream luxe, calm, voluptuous sexiness—or any other things you'd expect from a tiny lingerie boutique. But the supremely old-school **Orchard Corset** boasts virtues far more rare: great prices and owners who can guess your bra size on sight. Of course, not every woman wants to have an aging guy in a yarmulke aim his X-ray vision at her breasts (I certainly didn't the first time I went in there as an awkward, busty teenager), but the personal attention to fit and the fine selection of both high- and low-end intimates make it worth a trip, particularly if you're in need of larger or hard-to-find sizes. As does the cross-section of shoppers: The last time I was in there, the minuscule, curtained fitting rooms were crammed with an unlikely mix of uptown glamourpusses snagging bargain brassieres, heavily pregnant women in search of maternity bras, and college girls kitting themselves out in the shop's customized corsets. *157 Orchard Street, 212-674-0786.* ***Press***

Best jumping-off point for the burgeoning activist

When the radical feminist bookstore **Bluestockings** decided to expand, it reopened with a third more space, longer hours, and a broader vision. No longer chiefly feminist, Bluestockings now offers literature and a sense of community to anyone who is challenging systems of oppression, whether these are based on class, gender, race, or sexual bias. On any given night, you might grab an espresso at the fair-trade café and sit in on a release party for the radical sex-worker magazine *$pread*, or a presentation by Kate Bornstein, author of *Hello Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws*, or a film on the Hawaiian independence movement. During protests, Bluestockings is a reliable repository for maps and updates, as well as a ready site for early planning meetings. Other services include carrying nonprofit titles for Books Through Bars with mailing addresses for prisoners; hosting benefits for Picture the Homeless; and presenting regular updates on the legal battle of Green Scare defendant and well-known New York activist Daniel McGowan. Equally important, Bluestockings fosters the energy of burgeoning activists by answering questions and providing referrals and suggestions without attitude. Comfortable bench seats surrounded by zines, pins, patches, T-shirts, homemade DVDs, and free pamphlets make this a pretty cool spot for socially conscious young people to just hang out. *172 Allen Street, 212-777-6028.* ***Silke Tudor***

Best place to fall off a ladder

To fall off a ladder while, say, screwing in a lightbulb is sad. But to fall off a ladder while in hot pursuit of a first edition of *The Sun Also Rises* is kind of romantic. Finding a volume at **Westsider Books** can be a seriously perilous journey, with thousands of paperbacks and hardbacks crammed into every nook and cranny of the narrow 20-by-70-foot space, teetering in piles all the way to the ceiling. Two rickety 20-foot wooden ladders roll along the shelves, but only the most daring bibliophile will climb to the top. According to co-owner Brian Gonzalez, only one person has ever fallen off the ladder. "He was a bit tipsy from drinking, but he's still a customer." On a recent visit, we saw a man go about halfway up before the ladder began to tremble and shake. It seemed as though he wanted to browse higher than the letter *J*, but he just fingered a couple of copies of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and then slowly backed his way down. *2246 Broadway, 212-362-0706.* ***Ashman***

Best metamorphosing bookstore mascot

Firmin, the titular hero of Sam Sav- >>

>> age's first novel, is a rat who lives in the basement of a bookshop in Boston. He reads voraciously—books like *Huck Finn, Middlemarch*, and *Dead Souls*. This seems ambitious for a rat, what with his putative low standing in society, being told again and again he is bad, hated for centuries as a source of pestilence regardless of his individual character, and faced with the constant threat of extermination. One must be an extraordinary rat to crack the canon. But an owl . . . owls are wise; they can afford to be. (John Houseman's success at playing intellectuals was directly proportionate to his owlish nature.) Still, when I encountered an owl at the **Community Bookstore** in Park Slope I was surprised. The third occasion I saw her she had lapsed into dogdom. The next, owl again. It was some sort of owl-dog. Bookstore-owl owner Catherine Bohne says she was found four years ago. Derrick, a homeless man, had left her tied outside the shop, hoping Bohne would take her in. A man had jumped out of his van, Derrick later told Bohne, and thrust the bird/dog into his arms, saying, "My wife's having another baby. We can't keep her. Her name's Bibi." Bibi, a "shih tzu," was around 10 years old then, with "no fur and an infected uterus," Bohne says. She has a cream-white medium-haired coat with two onyx stripes, prominent pink eyelids, a face of concentric grayish-and-soft-tan rings, and a small gray mouth—all owl. She's in the store every day, but her reading habits are questionable. She seems to spend most of her time burrowing into the edge of a bookshelf, head buried in her fluff. *143 Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, 718-783-3075.* ***Reidy***

Best photography bookstore

It is the best, and it is the *only* independently run photography bookstore (i.e., not tied to an institution or a specific publisher) in New York City. Both of which make **Dashwood Books**, housed in a chic if understated storefront wedged between construction sites on Bond Street, seem more like an informal clubhouse for photographic bibliophiles than a strictly commercial institution. Dollars, however, are meant to be spent here. Owner and operator David Strettell (who used to work at Magnum Photos) has assembled a tempting array of treasures, many rarely seen stateside: from a Japanese photographer's exquisite visions of Paris circa 1950 to a catalog of portraits of people with glass eyes, published by a weird Dutch imprint. The shop (which opened last year) also carries a carefully edited selection of more widely distributed titles published by houses like Steidl and Aperture. *33 Bond Street, 212-387-8520.* ***Leslie Camhi***

Best 18 miles in Manhattan

The Strand bookstore promises its customers in New York—and internationally—"18 Miles of Books." Not even the legendary Foyle's Books in London comes close to the Strand in the adventures along those 18 miles. Whatever you're looking for, you'll find surprises—books you never knew you yearned for until you see them on the tables and shelves. And if you call 212-473-1452, there's a button you can press for a search for books. But being there for the unexpected discoveries is more fun. Plus, the guy behind the counter is often Fred Bass, the flagship's captain, with an encyclopedic knowledge of books, many of which he's read. *828 Broadway, 212-473-1452; annex at 95 Fulton Street, 212-406-0074.* ***Nat Hentoff***

Best hotel gift shop

Snow globes and Big Apple magnets won't be found at the Hotel on Rivington's gift shop, **Annie O.** This is instead the place to locate souvenirs New Yorkers would like to buy for themselves. Dangerously located amid the bars and clubs of the Lower East Side and open late (from 11 a.m. until midnight, Tuesday through Sunday), Annie O. is a magnet for booze-fueled shopping splurges. The shop's curator, Annie Ohayon, has a good eye for what the downtown hipster wants (there's loads of elegant skull-and-crossbones jewelry), as she's a former music publicist for Lou Reed and Smashing Pumpkins, among others. Items most likely to end up on the credit card after three martinis: Acrylic timepieces by Toy Watch ($175 to $295), red handmade square-framed sunglasses from Blinde ($280), and eco-chic organic-cotton Loomstate T-shirts ($55). For the more sober barhopper with only $25 to spare, good finds include Freeze lip gloss; polka-dot Havaiana flip-flops; rose, star, or skull pins; Lomolito disposable cameras; and Nat Shermans. Souvenir most likely to be regretted in the morning: a vintage Rolex, $3,500. *105 Rivington Street, 212-475-3490.* ***Ashman***

Best icing on the cake

The room isn't especially appetizing: glossy white walls lit by fluorescent lights, shelves and revolving displays crammed full of cookie cutters, hard-candy molds, plastic bride and groom figurines, and tooth-cracking ornaments. The surroundings may not be so tasty, but the cake decoration classes run by Lynette Clarke in the back of Prospect Heights' **Cake Works** certainly are. The classes, which cost around $10 per hour, run from frosting basics to the pinnacle of dessert adornment: gum-paste flowers, edible cake tops, bas-relief appliqué, bridge and extension work. On a recent afternoon, behind a table littered with plastic molds and Argo cornstarch, Clarke, a 25-year resident of Brooklyn, presided over a class on fondant icing falls and frills, while her school-age son tidied supplies. Clarke was strict but friendly as she trimmed lace-like strips of icing with a pastry knife or urged her students to lean into their pastry rollers. As one of the mothers at the table pulled an embellished strip of fondant free of its mold, she couldn't help happily exclaiming, "Oh! Oh! My, my, my!" *700 Washington Avenue, Brooklyn, 718-636-2211.* ***Soloski***

Best family-style market

One of only four enclosed Latino marketplaces remaining in New York, the Moore Street Retail Market, or **La Marqueta de Williamsburg**, as it has been known for more than 50 years, is about half the size of the Essex Street Market but twice as homey. Seniors frequently lounge at tables playing dominoes under skylights and fluttering flags, which represent the numerous nationalities blending here (Puerto Rican, Dominican, Ecuadoran, and Mexican, to name a few). Kids scurry between 26 customized stalls selling fresh flowers, produce, bulk herbs, blessings, meat, candles, Catholic saints, CDs, haircuts, baseball hats, gifts, hangover remedies, and tailoring services—basically, everything you might need for a grand fiesta (and its aftermath). If what you want are a few laughs and a little perspective, kick back on a sunken bench with Manuel Riviera, the self-proclaimed mayor of La Marqueta, who started coming here as a kid "when 25 pounds of potatoes cost 15 cents." (Riviera recently moved his music store—a neighborhood institution for 25 years—into the festive environs of the Marqueta.) Before you leave, wedge yourself between the policemen and postal workers who swear by the tacos, gyros, and full breakfasts served at Diego's American Coffee Shop (there's no menu, but if he can, Diego will make it). It's true that supermarkets, with their bulk buying power, are a little cheaper, but the experience of La Marqueta is worth a few cents more a pound. *108 Moore Street, Brooklyn, 718-384-1371.* ***Tudor***

Best late-night fossil retailer

You're already running late for your friend's birthday party downtown when you realize you've forgotten to get a gift. Sure, you could stop at any of a dozen tiny, interchangeable stores in the West Village and buy the requisite whimsical birthday card with the throwaway pop-culture reference and the inevitable, overpriced kitschy-ironic tchotchke. Or you could get an original Victorian card and vintage tin toy from **House of Cards & Curiosities**, the gift shop that boasts, "Never a Hallmark here!" For that very special friend—that very *morbid* special friend—you can get a creepy phrenology head, a mounted insect the size of a lobster, or a hand-carved Day of the Dead tableau (one we fell in love with on a recent visit: a skeleton shower scene—like *Carrie*, only creepier). Open till 10, so you can take your time browsing through the basketful of 400 million-year-old trilobite fossils one by one. *23 Eighth Avenue, 212-675-6178.* ***Jorge Morales***

Best place to get bathed like a giant baby

At uptown spa **Graceful Services** a nice woman will lay you down completely naked on a folding bed and scour your butt, legs, and any rough patches on your body until they're silky smooth. After this full body scrub ($80), she'll help you into a steamer shower featuring multiple nozzles that cleanse from every direction. Not since you were two years old and your mom used to bathe you have you felt so fresh. Wouldn't it be nice to start each morning like that? This no-frills spa can't be beat when it comes to experience and price: A 120-minute massage and scrub combo is $120, making it one of the best deals in town. Therapists have been trained in the ancient Chinese art of qigong, which opens up vital points in the body to increase circulation and leave you relaxed long after you've exited the premises. *1092 Second Avenue, 212-593-9904.* ***Grace Bastidas***

Most eyebrow-obsessed New Yorker

"If you touch your eyebrows I will kill you." Although I usually frown heavily upon death threats, when the ultimatum is uttered by eyebrow-expert extraordinaire **Jimena Garcia** at Robin Evans Skincare Soho, I find myself promising to immediately throw out my tweezers and book consecutive follow-up appointments. This is the type of unquestioning loyalty a lead waxer can inspire. After honing her sense of proportion and symmetry at art school, Jimena dropped out—a chance class with a makeup artist having sent her on a career path whose origins lay in a personal brow obsession harbored since childhood. Now, for over a decade, Jimena has been focusing on shaping New Yorkers' arches. Her mania extends to extracurricular activities at Fresh Cosmetics, where she teaches eyebrow 101 to aspiring aestheticians. With all the talk of big brows being back, you might want to make several appointments to achieve Brooke Shields brows by Thanksgiving. But whatever you do, don't pluck between visits. *Jimena Garcia at Robin Evans Skincare Soho, 611 Broadway, suite 508, 212-677-6114.* ***Pascoe***

Best salon to get hammered at

Follow the sounds of bossa nova to **Maria Bonita Salon and Spa**, where it's happy hour all the time. This Brazilian-inspired full-service retreat not only offers manicures, pedicures, facials, massages, haircuts, and all the usual treatments available everywhere else, but there are cocktails too. Even if you book a 10 a.m. appointment, try not to go on an empty stomach—the ladies here will tempt you with a mouthwatering caipirinha (lime, sugar, cachaca), Brazil's national drink. Resistance is futile—after one glass, and with the help of Caetano Veloso and João Gilberto in the background, it's easy to imagine yourself lying on Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. (Tip: Patrons scheduled for a Brazilian bikini wax should down a few caipirinhas beforehand—the alcohol serves as an anesthetic). *12 Prince Street, 212-431-1520.* ***Bastidas***

Best place for my boyfriend to get a tattoo that's four times bigger than he said it would be

It's a copy of a Rembrandt etching of a man playing an early version of golf and it occupies a five-by-three-inch portion of his upper arm. Basically, it occupies his upper arm. After the initial shock wore off, though, I had to admit—that's a really nice-looking tat. Mike Bakaty is the man behind the ink. In fact, he's the man behind **Fineline Tattoos** itself. Bakaty was surreptitiously marking people on the Lower East Side for years during the ban on tattooing in New York. When Giuliani lifted the ban in 1997, the artist came out from underground and established his shop on the Lower East Side. Even if you're a sensitive type—the type that gets a Rembrandt permanently scratched into your arm—you want your tattoo artist to look like a tattoo artist. Bakaty is thin, bearded, and of course, heavily decorated. But shining through that gritty biker exterior is a Zen confidence—just the kind of energy that makes you say, "You know what, man? Let's go for it. Let's make my golfer five inches tall!" *21 First Avenue, 212-673-5154.* ***Lalli***

Best painless wax

The relationship between a woman and her aesthetician is a very personal one. After all, she gets to see you in all your "natural" glory when you go in for a bikini wax—and no matter how hairy it looks down there, she should never make you feel like a circus freak. Kristen Haines, owner of **Euphoria Day Spa** in Tribeca, has seen it all and immediately puts clients at ease. Committed to making every experience an enjoyable one, she treats hair removal like a fun activity between good friends. She's like your best pal from junior high school who showed you how to shave your legs without getting nicked. Her enthusiastic manner and soft touch make painful, embarrassing waxes a thing of the past. *18 Harrison Street, 212-295-5925.* ***Bastidas*** >>

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Best cheap cut-and-color

When I dye my hair, I'm used to smearing on some variation of auburn goo, inevitably getting my hands filthy and my bathroom stained, only to have the color fade in a few weeks. So when a friend told me about **Marysia's** $40 cut-and-color it sounded like a fabulous break from my usual DIY routine. This Polish salon is buzzing with activity; these ladies know what they're doing and are friendly to boot. They'll mix colors to get it exactly right, have you in and out of there fairly quickly, and you won't have to return for a few months. You may not have any idea what they're gossiping about as you sit and wait for the dye to take effect, but you don't need to know. The rock-bottom prices and efficiency far surpass places with superior ambience. You'll walk out with a shimmering new shade of hair, money in your pocket, and no evidence of your dye job on your face and hands. They also offer facials, manicures, and waxing, and they take walk-ins; I recommend going when they open, at 8 a.m. *101 First Avenue, 212-777-2490, marysiabeautysalon.com.* ***Rachel Kramer Bussel***

Best hair salon in a downtown loft

One of the many things that big cities like Tokyo and New York have in common is finite ground-level commercial real estate; there is just not enough to go around. Some of the more inventive and forward-thinking business owners opt out and take up shop on the edges: a new neighborhood, a side street, a basement. In the case of the **Takamichi Hair** salon, the whole seventh floor of an industrial building on Great Jones has everything to gain by leaving the walk-ins with the rest of the riffraff on the sidewalk. A freight elevator pulls you up to the top floor and opens onto a bright airy loft. Designed by Belgian architect Sandra van Rolleghem, whose portfolio includes revamping a Christian Dior retail space in Paris, the salon takes advantage of fantastic city views and offers a minimalist decor that allows customers to forget the hustle and bustle below. The hair styling lives up to the promise of the space; Takamichi and his team have been giving impeccable and innovative haircuts (starting at $70) in this neighborhood since 2000. *35 Great Jones Street, 7th floor, 212-420-7979.* ***Remsberg***

Best threesome

Threesomes can be tricky to organize. First, you need to find willing participants who share similar ideas about what's pleasurable. Secondly, the acts need to be performed smoothly so that no one feels left out and you get exactly what you crave—which is usually a lot of attention! Third, you hope that afterward everyone is completely satisfied. Unfortunately, someone always regrets it, and complications inevitably arise. This is thankfully not the case at **Banyan Citi Spa**, a Zen-like haven in Soho where they know how to triple your fun. Their Rapid-Relief Four-Hand Massage ($200) is the perfect threesome: Two massage therapists rub every inch of your body while you just lie there feeling the stress fade away. The most you're required to do is to say whether you like it hard or soft. The uninitiated may find so many fingers daunting, but trust us, you'll soon be wondering what six hands can do. *474 West Broadway, 212-388-1288.* ***Bastidas***

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